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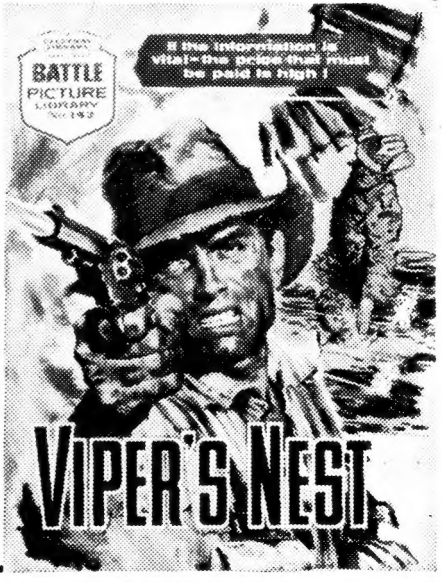

Crash Landing

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Chapter 1. Battle Smoke

AND BECAUSE THIS WAS, INDEED, GERMANY, THE NAZIS FOUGHT BACK SAVAGELY, STRIVING TO DESTROY THIS ALLIED FOOTHOLD ON THE SOIL OF THE FATHERLAND.
ACHTUNG! MORE BRITISH PARACHUTE TROOPS! WIPE THEM OUT!

BUT THE AIRBORNE TROOPS WERE NOT TO BE DENIED. THE TASTE OF VICTORY WAS IN THEIR MOUTHS AND, SHOULDER TO SHOULDER, THEY FOUGHT IT OUT WITH THE ENEMY.
COME ON, CHAPS! INTO 'EM!
AAAGH!

PARATROOPS AND GLIDER TROOPS -- THEY WERE THE WINGED SPEARHEAD THAT TOOK THE FIRST SHOCK OF BATTLE. THEN, BEHIND THEM, CAME THE INFANTRY.
IT'S ALL BEEN DONE FOR US HERE! STRAIGHT ON -- WE'VE GOT TO PASS THROUGH THE AIRBORNE TO REACH OUR OBJECTIVES!

THE SECTION OF A FAMOUS RIFLE REGIMENT WERE VETERANS, SCHOOLED IN THE ART OF STAYING ALIVE.
WATCH IT! THERE'S MOVEMENT IN THAT SMOKE!

SUDDENLY, THE BRITTLE RATTLE OF AN AUTOMATIC WEAPON SOUNDED THROUGH THE SMOKE AND BULLETS SLASHED ABOUT THEM.
I THOUGHT SO! BREN GUNNER... NAIL HIM!
SURE, SAR'NT~~ BUT THAT SOUNDED LIKE A STEN!

SWIFTLY, THE SERGEANT CANCELLED HIS ORDER ~~ THAT CRACKLE OF FIRE HAD SOUNDED LIKE A STEN.
HEY! YOU OUT THERE! WALK IN~~ WE'LL GIVE YOU TEN SECONDS~~ THEN WE'LL BLAST YOU!

THE RIFLEMEN GRIPPED THEIR WEAPONS AND WAITED. SECONDS TICKED BY REMORSELESSLY...
I CAN SEE MOVEMENT~~ LOOKS LIKE ONE MAN...
WATCH IT! I KNOW THESE CURSED NAZIS AND THEIR TRICKS.

THEN, A MAN LURCHED FROM THE WRITHING SMOKE. HE FLUNG ASIDE THE STEN HE CARRIED AND STUMBLED TOWARDS THEM.

ONCE CLEAR OF THE CORDITE FUMES, HIS UNIFORM BECAME RECOGNISABLE.
STONE ME! IT'S A GLIDER PILOT!
MAYBE-- AND MAYBE HE'S A JERRY WAITING TO SHOOT US IN THE BACK!

THE SECTION SERGEANT SENT TWO MEN WITH FIXED BAYONETS BACK WITH THE MAN IN THE LEATHER FLYING JACKET.
JUST WALKING IN, YOU SAY ? STRANGE ...
THE SAR'NT RECKONED HIM TO BE A JERRY, SIR. HE CERTAINLY DID SHOOT AT US ...

THE CAPTAIN STUDIED THE MYSTERY MAN'S PAYBOOK WITH INTEREST...
SERGEANT LAURENCE VINCENT -- IS THAT YOU ? WELL... SPEAK UP !
IT'S NO GOOD, SIR. HE WON'T SAY A THING -- OR CAN'T !

AND SO SERGEANT LAURENCE VINCENT OF THE GLIDER PILOT REGIMENT ~~ OR THE MAN CLAIMING THAT TITLE ~~ WAS SENT BACK TO A CASUALTY CLEARING STATION . . .
IF YOU'RE NOT WHO YOU CLAIM TO BE, CHUM, YOU'LL PROBABLY END UP BEING SHOT!
HE ISN'T CLAIMING TO BE ANYBODY, SARGE ~~ HE HASN'T SAID A WORD!

THE MEDICAL OFFICER LOOKED WITH DIFFERENT EYES ON THE MAN OF MYSTERY.
NOW LISTEN TO ME, SERGEANT VINCENT ~~ I THINK YOU CAN HEAR ME. WE HAVE PLENTY OF CASES LIKE YOU, SOMETIMES THEY ARE CALLED SHELL-SHOCK. WE CAN HELP YOU ~~ DO YOU UNDERSTAND?

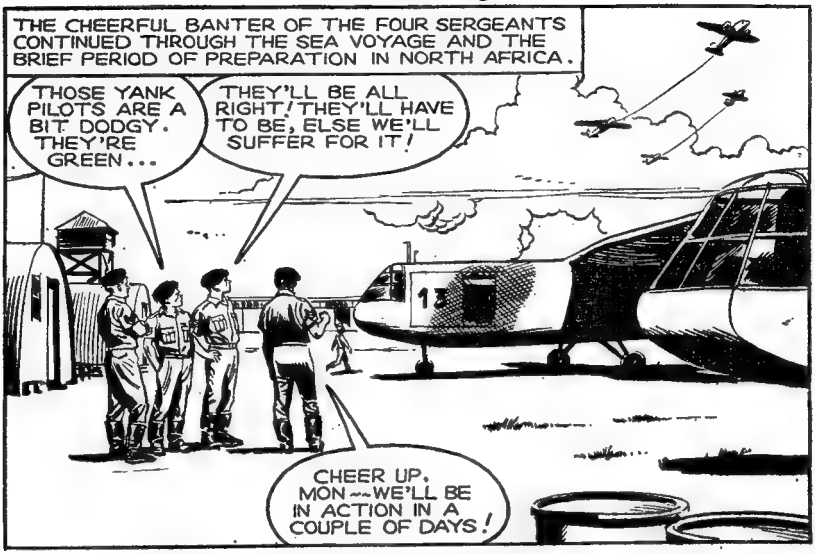
SLOWLY, THE MAN ON THE BED TURNED AND STARED AT THE MAJOR WITH EYES FILLED WITH A GREAT AND ENDURING HORROR.
I'VE BEEN ON TO YOUR UNIT. FROM WHAT THEY SAY, YOU SEEM TO BE LAURENCE VINCENT RIGHT ENOUGH. NOW I'M GOING TO ASK YOU A QUESTION--AN IMPORTANT QUESTION.
SLOWLY, AND SPEAKING WITH GREAT EMPHASIS, THE MEDICAL MAJOR ASKED HIS QUESTION...
LISTEN, SERGEANT VINCENT--DO YOU REMEMBER SERGEANT BILL WRIGHT?
AND SERGEANT VINCENT SCREAMED!
BILL! NO---NO--- I DIDN'T MEAN TO, BILL! I DIDN'T MEAN TO KILL YOU!

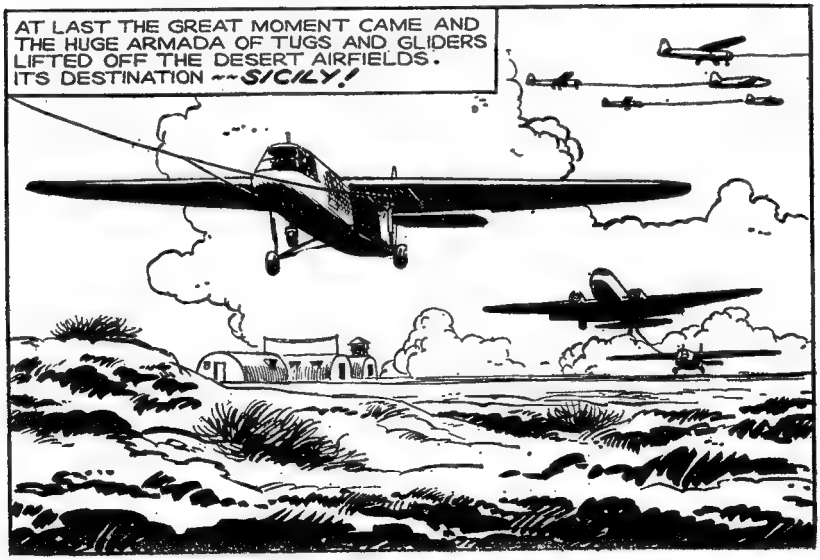
SWEAT POURED FROM HIS TAUT FACE AS HIS BATTLE-DEADENED MIND WAS SHOCKED INTO REMEMBRANCE ...
RELAX, SERGEANT! YOUR MEMORY IS RETURNING. BUT TRY TO REMAIN CALM~~NO MATTER HOW STRONGLY YOU FEEL!
BUT BILL~~ I KILLED HIM!

AS MEMORIES GHOSTED BACK TO LARRY VINCENT, HE SLUMPED BACK IN THE BED, HIS EXHAUSTED BODY CLAMOURING FOR SLEEP~~BUT HIS TORTURED MIND WOULD ALLOW HIM NO REST.
RELAX~~THAT'S WHAT THEY ALL SAID, ALL THE INSTRUCTORS. I REMEMBER~~ I REMEMBER BILL WRIGHT, AND JOCK STANDISH, AND "CRASH" CHARLTON...

Chapter 2. Glider Troops

Crash Landing

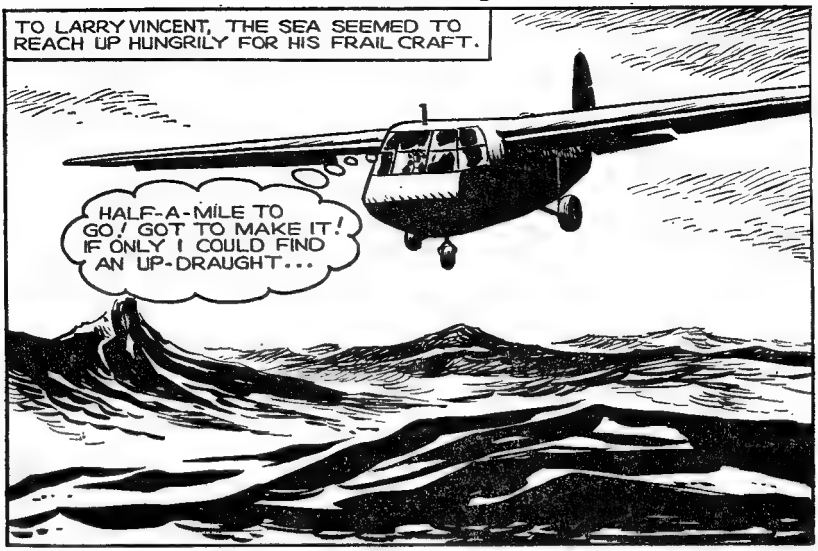

THE CHEERFUL BANTER OF THE FOUR SERGEANTS CONTINUED THROUGH THE SEA VOYAGE AND THE BRIEF PERIOD OF PREPARATION IN NORTH AFRICA.
THOSE YANK PILOTS ARE A BIT DODGY. THEY'RE GREEN...
THEY'LL BE ALL RIGHT! THEY'LL HAVE TO BE, ELSE WE'LL SUFFER FOR IT!
CHEER UP, MON--WE'LL BE IN ACTION IN A COUPLE OF DAYS!


AT LAST THE GREAT MOMENT CAME AND THE HUGE ARMADA OF TUGS AND GLIDERS LIFTED OFF THE DESERT AIRFIELDS. ITS DESTINATION --SICILY!

A GRIM ELATION FILLED LARRY VINCENT. NOW HE WOULD PUT INTO PRACTICE THE FRUITS OF MONTHS OF TOUGH TRAINING...
I MUST DO WELL IN THE ACTION ~~ CAN'T LET THE BOYS DOWN. GOT TO PROVE I'M A GOOD SOLDIER AS WELL AS A GOOD GLIDER PILOT!.
THEN THE SKY FILLED WITH THE WICKED BURSTS OF NAZI FLAK. GLIDERS AND TUGS LURCHED CRAZILY IN THE SHOCK WAVE OF THE BURSTS.
THEY'RE KNOCKING US OUTTA THE SKY LIKE SITTING DUCKS!
WE'LL HAVE TO SLIP THE TOW! WE HAVEN'T A CHANCE!

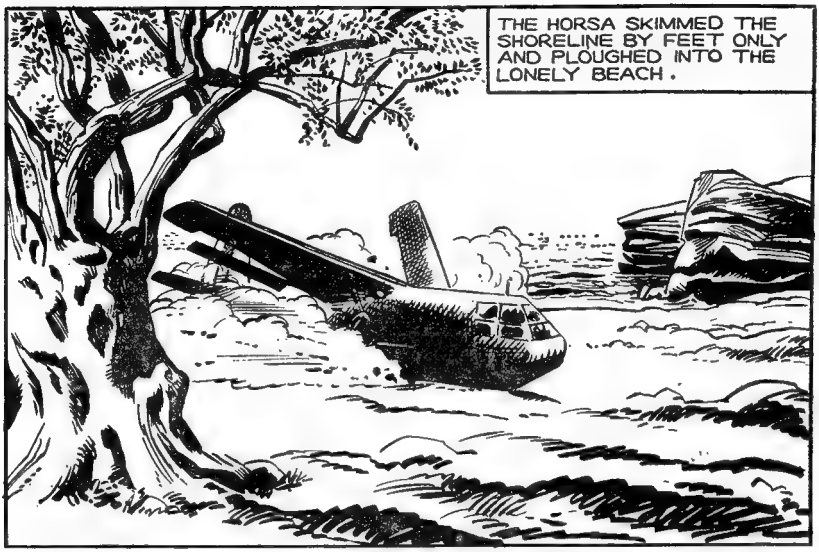
FLURRIED BY FIERCE HEADWINDS AND THE VIOLENT CONCUSSION OF ENEMY FLAK, THE INEXPERIENCED TUG PILOTS RELEASED THEIR TOWS ~~AND THE GLIDERS SLID FREE, MILES FROM THE SICILIAN SHORE ...
GOOD GRIEF! HE'S SLIPPED US! WE'RE TOO FAR OUT!

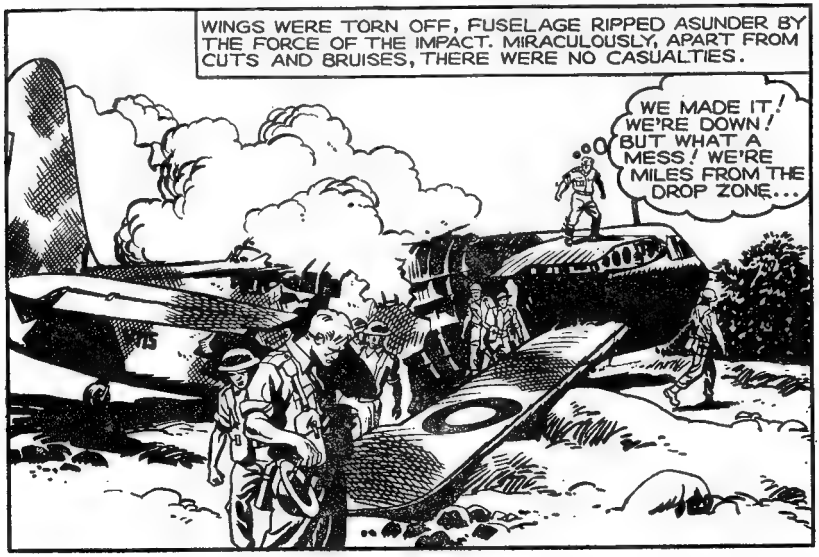
THEN THE GLIDERS WERE STRUGGLING DESPERATELY TO KEEP AIRBORNE AS IF THEY WERE GREAT, WOUNDED BIRDS. MANY DID NOT MAKE IT....


TO LARRY VINCENT, THE SEA SEEMED TO REACH UP HUNGRILY FOR HIS FRAIL CRAFT.
HALF-A-MILE TO GO! GOT TO MAKE IT! IF ONLY I COULD FIND AN UP-DRAUGHT...

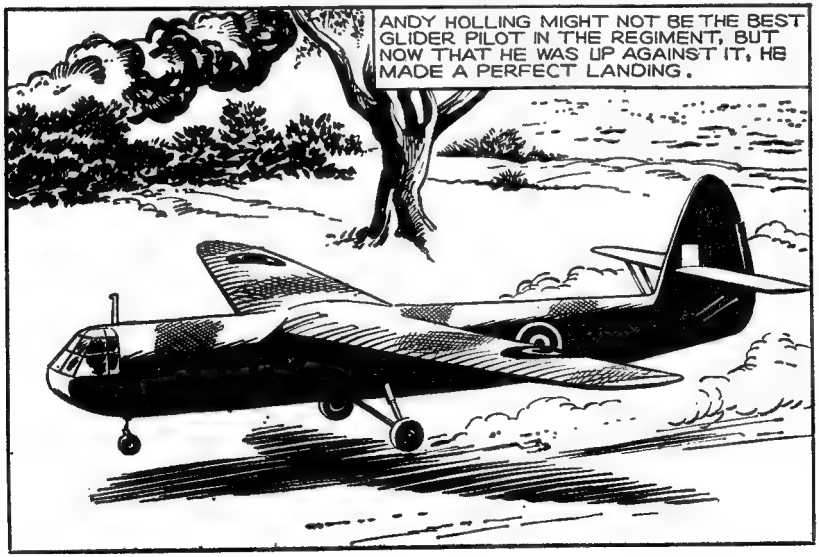
THE CREW OF THE ANTI-TANK GUN THAT WAS THE CARGO OF LARRY'S GLIDER WAITED WITH MOUNTING FEAR FOR THE CRUSHING SHOCK OF IMPACT. WITH THE WAVES ...
STONE ME! WE'LL BE IN THE DRINK ANY MINUTE!
CAN YOU HOLD HER, SERGEANT? WE'RE AWFULLY CLOSE TO THE SEA...

LARRY VINCENT WAS FIGHTING THE CONTROLS WITH EVERY VESTIGE OF SKILL HE POSSESSED.
I--I CAN JUST HOLD HER LONG ENOUGH! HANG ON--IT'LL BE A BUMPY LANDING!


THE HORSA SKIMMED THE SHORELINE BY FEET ONLY AND PLOUGHED INTO THE LONELY BEACH.


WINGS WERE TORN OFF, FUSELAGE RIPPED ASUNDER BY THE FORCE OF THE IMPACT. MIRACULOUSLY, APART FROM CUTS AND BRUISES, THERE WERE NO CASUALTIES.
WE MADE IT! WE'RE DOWN! BUT WHAT A MESS! WE'RE MILES FROM THE DROP ZONE...

THEN THEIR GAZE WAS JERKED UPWARDS AS ANOTHER HORSA SWISHED IN LOW...
THAT'S ANDY! PUT HER DOWN SAFELY, ANDY, BOY ~~ GENTLY DOES IT... NOW!


ANDY HOLLING MIGHT NOT BE THE BEST GLIDER PILOT IN THE REGIMENT, BUT NOW THAT HE WAS UP AGAINST IT, HE MADE A PERFECT LANDING.

THE SOLDIERS FROM THE TWO GLIDERS SOON JOINED UP.
THAT WAS A BEAUTY OF A PUT DOWN, ANDY...
I SURPRISED MYSELF, LARRY! WHAT DO WE DO NOW?
WE'RE MILES FROM OUR RENDEZVOUS AND THERE ARE GERMANS IN THE WAY--BUT THAT'S WHERE WE'LL MAKE FOR, JUST THE SAME!

THE AIRBORNE WERE THE SPEARHEAD OF THE ALLIED INVASION --AND THERE WOULD BE NO SITTING ON THE SIDELINES FOR THEM.
NOW OUR REAL WORK BEGINS, LARRY. FLYING GLIDERS IS ONLY A PART OF IT. WHEN WE BUMP INTO THE WEHRMACHT WE'LL REALLY BEGIN TO EARN OUR PAY...
ANDY'S RIGHT! THAT'S THE REAL TESTING TIME!

THE TESTING TIME WAS EVEN NEARER THAN LARRY VINCENT HAD IMAGINED. A SUDDEN, LETHAL BURST OF SPANDAU FIRE LASHED ACROSS THE ROAD ~~AND LARRY WAS THE FIRST TO RE-ACT.
SPANDAU! TAKE COVER! GET THE BREN GOING THERE! SNAP IT UP!

THE SPANDAU'S BRUTAL CONE OF BULLETS TRAVERSED ON TO THE JEEP AND ITS OCCUPANTS.

THE BREN AND RIFLES WERE ALREADY POUNDING OUT A FIERCE REPLY TO THE ENEMY MACHINE GUNS.
THE LIEUTENANT'S BOUGHT IT! IT'S UP TO US NOW, ANDY!
WE'VE GOT TO NAIL THAT SPANDAU! OTHERWISE THE JERRIES CAN PIN US DOWN HERE WHILE THEY SEND A FLANK PARTY TO TAKE US!

ANDY HOLLING HAD AT ONCE FALLEN INTO THE COOL PROFESSIONALISM OF THE BORN FIGHTING MAN.
WE'LL OUTFLANK THEM FIRST, LARRY! KEEP THE BREN GOING~~ MAKE 'EM KEEP THEIR HEADS DOWN! THEN WE'LL LOB IN A FEW MILLS THIRTY-SIXES!
ALL RIGHT, ANDY~~ BUT YOU TAKE CARE! THOSE JERRIES PLAY FOR KEEPS!

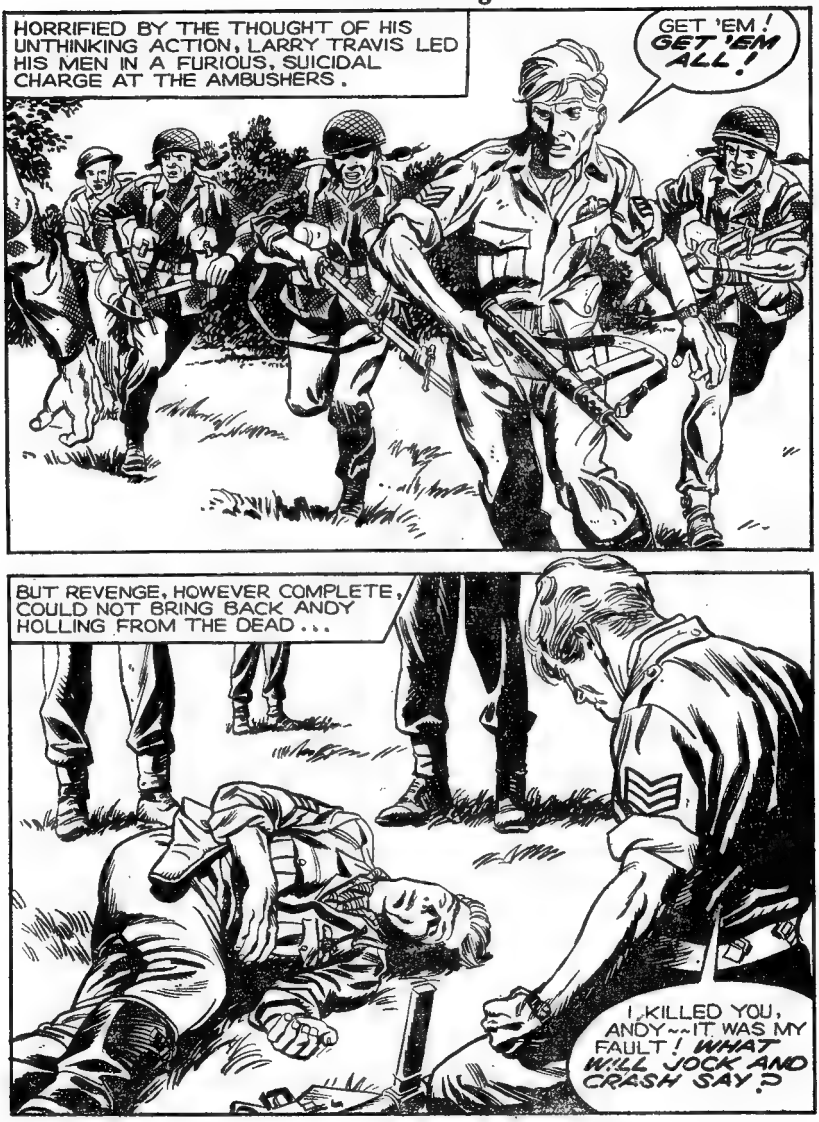
ANXIOUS MOMENTS DRAGGED PAST AS THE SPANDAU KEPT UP ITS FEROCIOUS SNARL AND THE HAMMERING BREN REPLIED...
THEY'VE GOT US COLD~~AND WE CAN'T EVEN RETREAT, THE SPANDAU WOULD CUT US TO RIBBONS. COME ON, ANDY~~YOU'VE GOT TO DO IT!

AT THAT MOMENT, SHADOWY FIGURES ROSE BEHIND THE SPANDAU NEST~~ AND . . .
NOW!
ACHTUNG!
BUT THAT CRY OF WARNING BECAME A DESPERATE WAIL OF DESPAIR AS THE GRENADES EXPLODED . . .

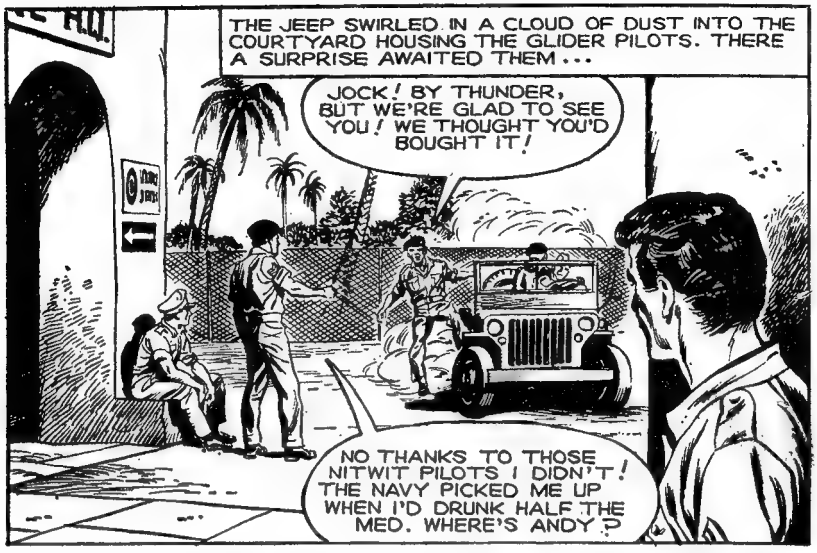
TO SERGEANT LARRY VINCENT, THAT ABRUPT EXPLOSION AND THE INSTANT SILENCE OF THE SPANDAU SIGNALLED THE END OF THE ACTION ...
GOOD SHOW, ANDY!

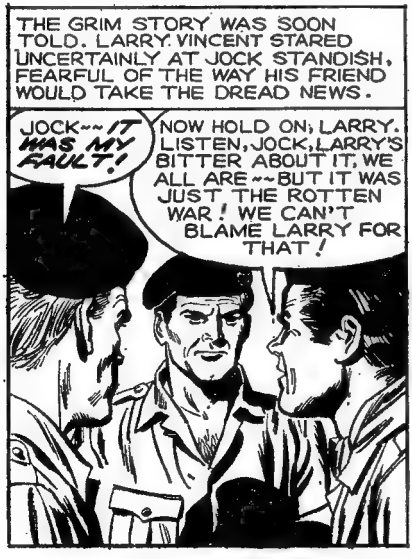
BUT NOT ALL THE NAZIS IN THAT AMBUSH HAD BEEN WIPED OUT. THE SIGHTS OF MAUSERS AND SCHMEISSERS WERE BEING LAID ON THE UNWARY AIRBORNE TROOPS.
GET THOSE TOMMIES IN THE DITCH! I'LL SMASH THE BOMBERS HERE!

AS IN A NIGHTMARE, ANDY HOLLING SAW THE FRUITS OF HIS SWIFT AND HEROIC ACTION THROWN AWAY...
NO! NO! YOU IDIOT, LARRY--IT ISN'T ALL OVER YET!
GLIDER PILOT SERGEANT ANDY HOLLING PAID FOR THAT MOMENT OF CARELESSNESS ON LARRY'S PART WITH HIS LIFE.


HORRIFIED BY THE THOUGHT OF HIS UNTHINKING ACTION, LARRY TRAVIS LED HIS MEN IN A FURIOUS, SUICIDAL CHARGE AT THE AMBUSHERS.
GET 'EM! GET 'EM ALL!
BUT REVENGE, HOWEVER COMPLETE, COULD NOT BRING BACK ANDY HOLLING FROM THE DEAD...
I KILLED YOU, ANDY--IT WAS MY FAULT! WHAT WILL JOCK AND CRASH SAY?

Chapter 3. Victim of Fate


HQ.
THE JEEP SWIRLED IN A CLOUD OF DUST INTO THE COURTYARD HOUSING THE GLIDER PILOTS. THERE A SURPRISE AWAITED THEM...
JOCK! BY THUNDER, BUT WE'RE GLAD TO SEE YOU! WE THOUGHT YOU'D BOUGHT IT!
NO THANKS TO THOSE NITWIT PILOTS! I DIDN'T! THE NAVY PICKED ME UP WHEN I'D DRUNK HALF THE MED. WHERE'S ANDY?


THE GRIM STORY WAS SOON TOLD. LARRY VINCENT STARED UNCERTAINLY AT JOCK STANDISH, FEARFUL OF THE WAY HIS FRIEND WOULD TAKE THE DREAD NEWS.
JOCK--IT WAS MY FAULT!
NOW HOLD ON, LARRY. LISTEN, JOCK, LARRY'S BITTER ABOUT IT, WE ALL ARE--BUT IT WAS JUST THE ROTTEN WAR! WE CAN'T BLAME LARRY FOR THAT!

JOCK STANDISH REMEMBERED HE WAS THE FRIEND OF LARRY VINCENT AS MUCH AS HE HAD BEEN OF ANDY HOLLING.
NO, LARRY--DON'T BLAME YOURSELF. WE'VE ALL A LOT TO LEARN AND WAR DOESN'T HAND OUT SECOND CHANCES.
WE'RE STILL TOGETHER--AND WE'LL STICK IT OUT!

THEY TALKED THE INCIDENT OVER AGAIN AND AGAIN ~~ AND NEITHER STANDISH NOR CHARLTON COULD BLAME TRAVIS, FOR EACH KNEW HE COULD HAVE MADE THE SAME MISTAKE.
CAPTAIN EVANS DOESN'T LOOK TOO HAPPY ABOUT GOING BACK TO BLIGHTY.
HE LOST A KID BROTHER IN THE LAST DO ~~ AND HE KNOWS WE'RE IN FOR MORE TROUBLE AS SOON AS WE'RE UP TO STRENGTH AGAIN.
THE JOURNEY HOME SEEMED ENDLESS TO THE MEN OF THE GLIDER PILOT REGIMENT. BUT AT LAST ENGLAND CAME INTO VIEW, JUST AS AN AIR RAID BEGAN...
YON'S A FINE WELCOME!
KEEP YOUR PECKER UP, JOCK ME BOY! PRETTY SOON WE'LL HAVE THE CHANCE FOR ANOTHER CRACK AT JERRY!
I MUST FORGET ABOUT ANDY ~~ IT'S OVER! BROODING WILL DO NO GOOD. THE QUICKER I'M IN ACTION AGAIN THE BETTER!

SOME REINFORCEMENTS WERE ALREADY WAITING FOR THEM WHEN THEY DISEMBARKED.
ALL SET? LET'S GO~~ THE CONVOY'S MOVING OFF.
HEY! I SEE YOU'VE A SPARE SEAT~~ GOT ROOM FOR A PASSENGER?
THAT'S ANDY'S SEAT~~ OH, FOR A MOMENT, I FORGOT....

THE YOUNG GLIDER PILOT STEPPED FORWARD A LITTLE UNCERTAINLY...
THAT WAS ANDY'S SEAT~~ BUT IT'S EMPTY NOW!
GIVE THE LAD A LIFT... HE'S JUST JOINED THE REGIMENT.
SURE~~ JUMP ABOARD, MATE!

WITH A SMILE OF THANKS, SERGEANT BILL WRIGHT CLIMBED INTO THE JEEP...
THANKS~~ I WASN'T SURE WHERE TO GO. I GUESS IF I STICK WITH YOU THREE I'LL END UP IN THE RIGHT PLACE.

IN THE DAYS OF STRENUOUS TRAINING THAT FOLLOWED THEIR MEETING, THE THREE OLD COMRADES FOUND THEMSEVES TEAMED UP WITH THE NEWCOMER.
YOUNG BILL'S ALL RIGHT--AND HE'S A BORN GLIDER PILOT.
YES, HE FITS IN WELL WITH US -- ALMOST LIKE HAVING ANDY BACK...
52
52

THE GREAT ONSLAUGHT ON OCCUPIED EUROPE WAS CLOSE AT HAND, AND THE STRAIN WAS TELLING ON LARRY VINCENT.
I HATE TO SAY THIS, MON, BUT LARRY'S FLYING HAS BEEN ROTTEN LATELY.
I'VE NOTICED IT, TOO. I THINK HE'S BROODING OVER ANDY'S DEATH.
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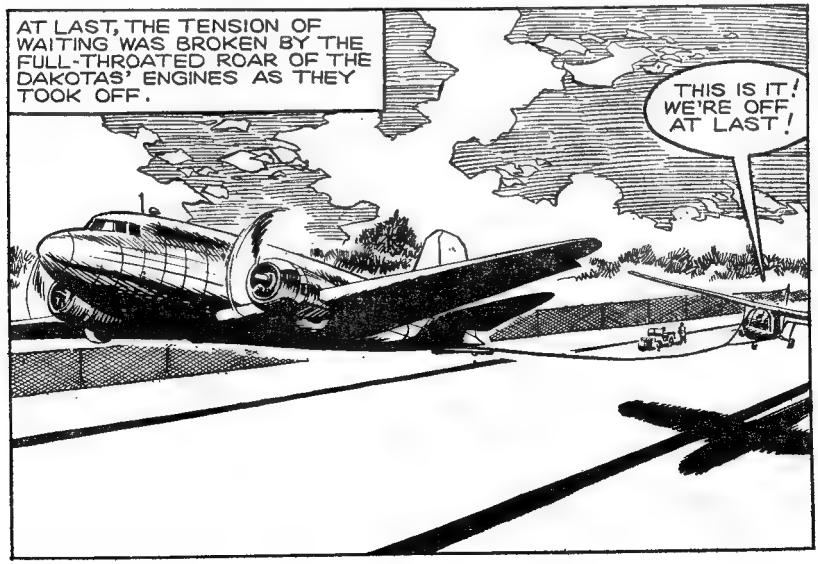
YOU TOLD ME ABOUT THAT, CRASH--AN UNFORTUNATE BUSINESS. BUT LARRY'S A GOOD GLIDER PILOT! HE'LL PUT HIS LOAD DOWN SAFELY...

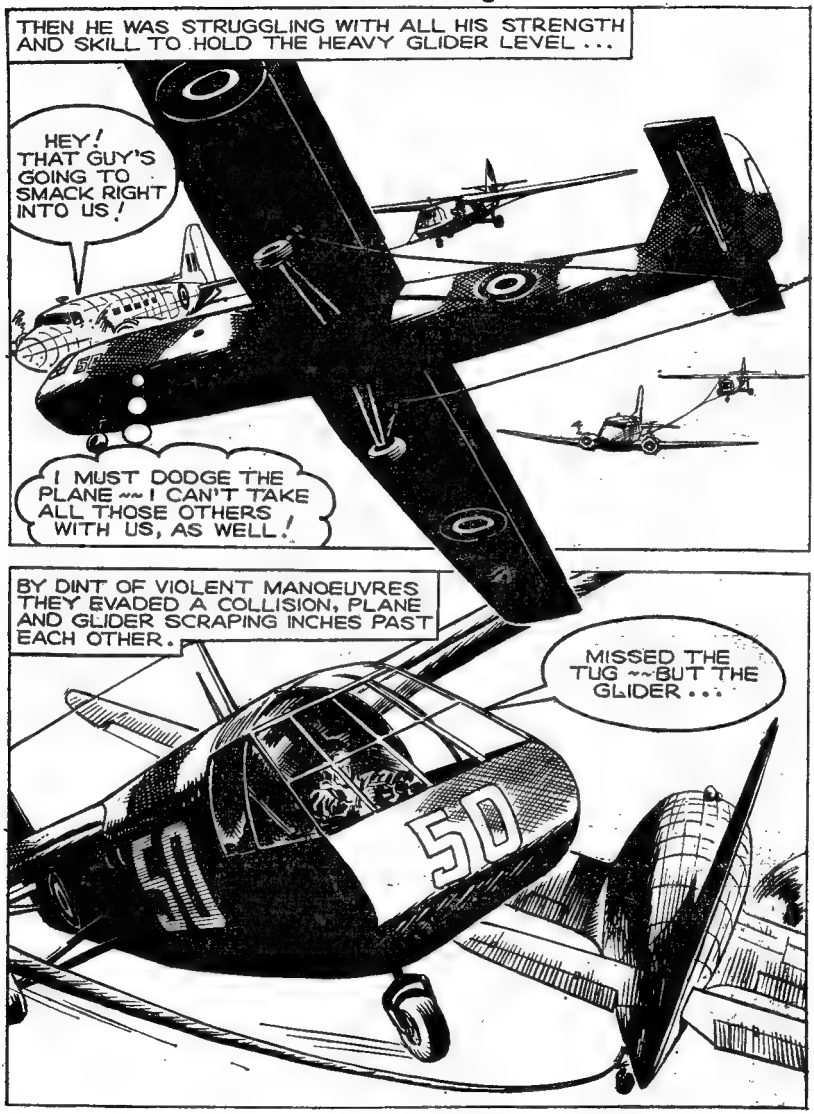
THEIR COMPANY COMMANDER HAD NOTICED IT ALSO.
I'LL BE ALL RIGHT, SIR. ONCE I'M IN THE AIR I HAVE NO TROUBLE.
WE NEED EVERY PILOT WE HAVE, VINCENT. TRY NOT TO THINK OF THE PAST— THAT'S OVER AND IT IS ONLY THE FUTURE THAT COUNTS.

D-DAY DAWNED AND THE AIRBORNE TROOPS BOARDED THE GLIDERS, NERVES KEYED FOR THE ORDEAL AHEAD...
SERGEANT VINCENT, SIR...
I HOPE YOU'LL GIVE US A GOOD RIDE, SERGEANT. I WANT MY MEN FIGHTING FIT WHEN WE LAND!


AT LAST, THE TENSION OF WAITING WAS BROKEN BY THE FULL-THROATED ROAR OF THE DAKOTAS' ENGINES AS THEY TOOK OFF.
THIS IS IT! WE'RE OFF AT LAST!

LARRY VINCENT'S GLIDER TOOK OFF IN THE FIRST FLIGHT. THE SECOND FOLLOWED, WITH JOCK STANDISH AT THE CONTROLS OF HIS GLIDER.
THERE GO LARRY AND JOCK IN THE FIRST TWO FLIGHTS LET'S HOPE WE ALL MEET UP SAFELY OVER THERE!

BUT THOSE FIRST TWO FLIGHTS WERE SCARCELY AIRBORNE WHEN LARRY VINCENT FELT HIS GLIDER JERK VIOLENTLY...
GOOD GRIEF! THE TOW LINE'S PARTED!


THEN HE WAS STRUGGLING WITH ALL HIS STRENGTH AND SKILL TO HOLD THE HEAVY GLIDER LEVEL ...
HEY! THAT GUY'S GOING TO SMACK RIGHT INTO US!
I MUST DODGE THE PLANE ~~ I CAN'T TAKE ALL THOSE OTHERS WITH US, AS WELL!
BY DINT OF VIOLENT MANOEUVRES THEY EVADED A COLLISION, PLANE AND GLIDER SCRAPING INCHES PAST EACH OTHER.
MISSED THE TUG ~~BUT THE GLIDER ...
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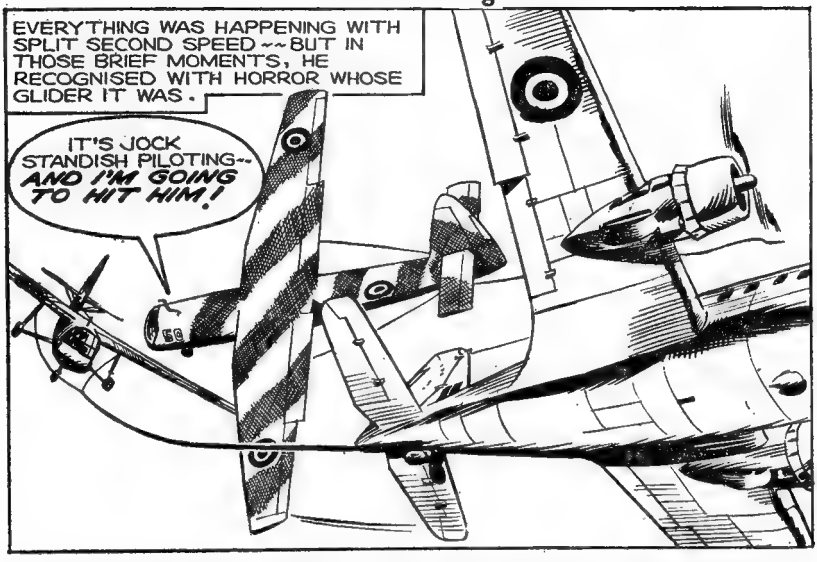
EVERYTHING WAS HAPPENING WITH SPLIT SECOND SPEED -- BUT IN THOSE BRIEF MOMENTS, HE RECOGNISED WITH HORROR WHOSE GLIDER IT WAS.
IT'S JOCK STANDISH PILOTING-- AND I'M GOING TO HIT HIM!
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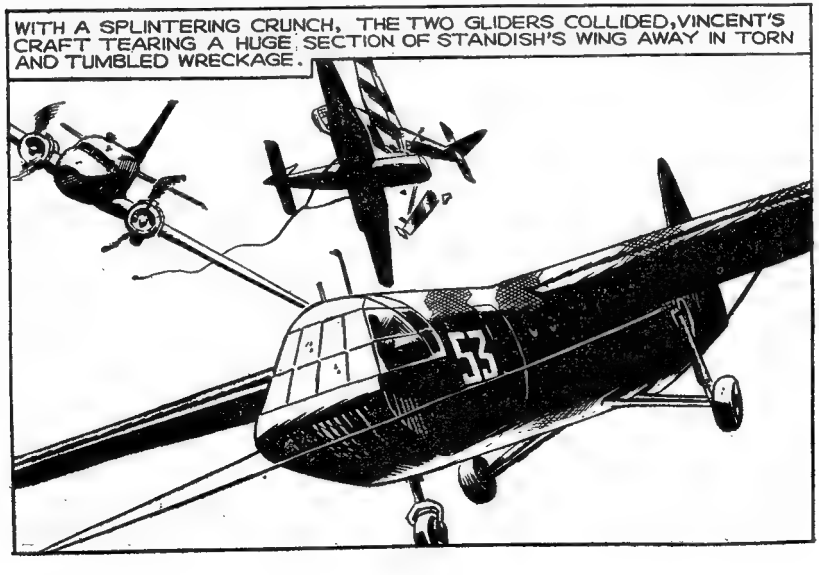
WITH A SPLINTERING CRUNCH, THE TWO GLIDERS COLLIDED, VINCENT'S CRAFT TEARING A HUGE SECTION OF STANDISH'S WING AWAY IN TORN AND TUMBLED WRECKAGE.
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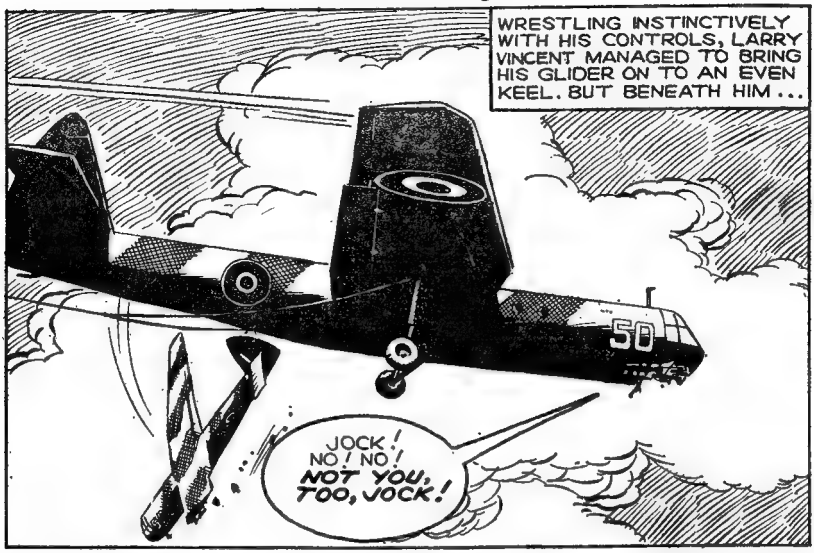
WRESTLING INSTINCTIVELY WITH HIS CONTROLS, LARRY VINCENT MANAGED TO BRING HIS GLIDER ON TO AN EVEN KEEL. BUT BENEATH HIM...
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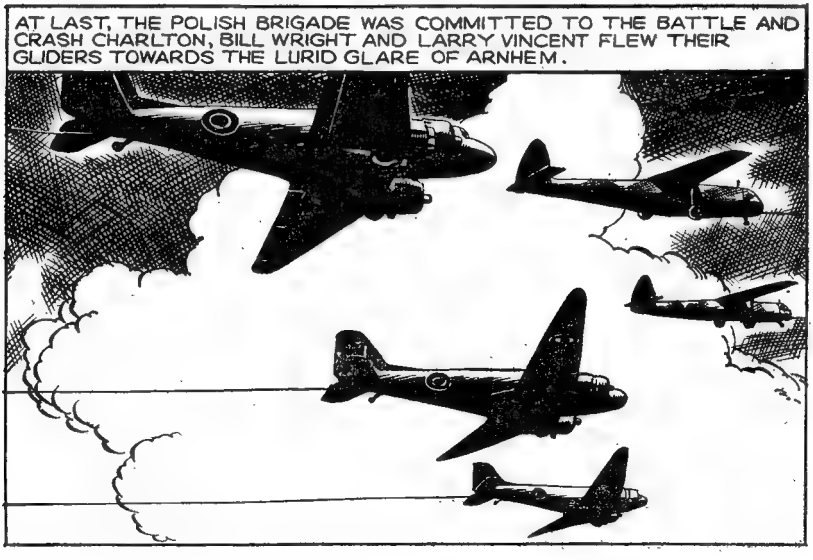
JOCK! NO! NO! NOT YOU, TOO, JOCK!

FOR JOCK STANDISH AND THE UNFORTUNATE MEN HIS GLIDER CARRIED, THE END OF THE WAR CAME IN A SINGLE SMASHING IMPACT.

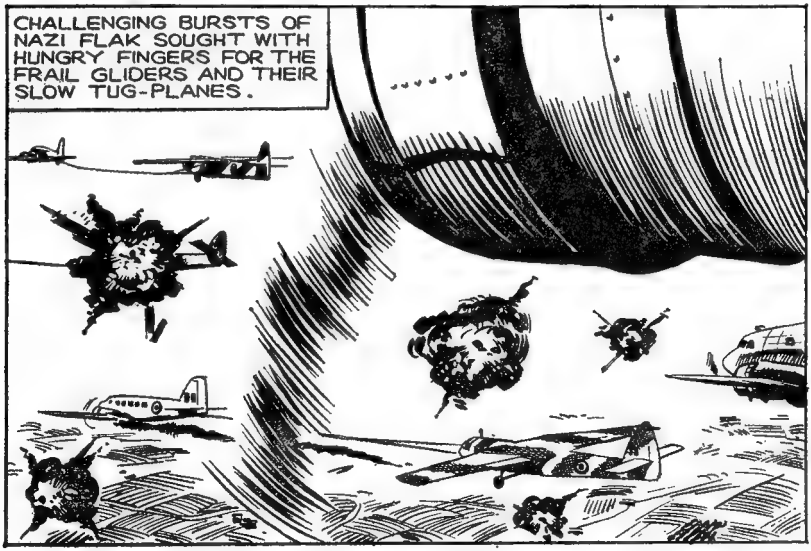
SO D-DAY CAME AND WENT FOR LARRY VINCENT. THE COURT OF ENQUIRY FOUND NO BLAME WAS ATTACHING TO HIM, BUT HE FRETTED WITH FRESH BITTERNESS AGAINST THE FATE ENMESHING HIM...
IT'S NO GOOD, CRASH~~ I CAN'T GET OVER JOCK GOING LIKE THAT. I COLLIDED WITH HIM ~~ IT HAD TO BE ME!
DON'T BE SILLY, LARRY! YOU COULDN'T HELP THE TOWLINE PARTING.

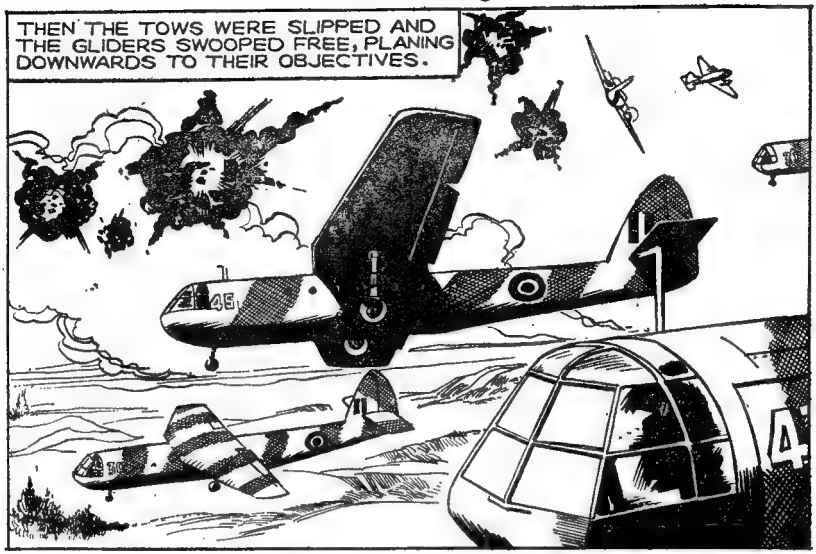
EVEN HIS SLEEPING MOMENTS WERE HAUNTED BY THE MEMORY OF THIS NEW TRAGEDY.
JOCK! GET OUT OF THE WAY... GET OUT OF THE WAY!
QUIET, LARRY-- YOU'RE HAVING NIGHTMARES AGAIN. JOCK'S GONE--HE WON'T BE BACK!

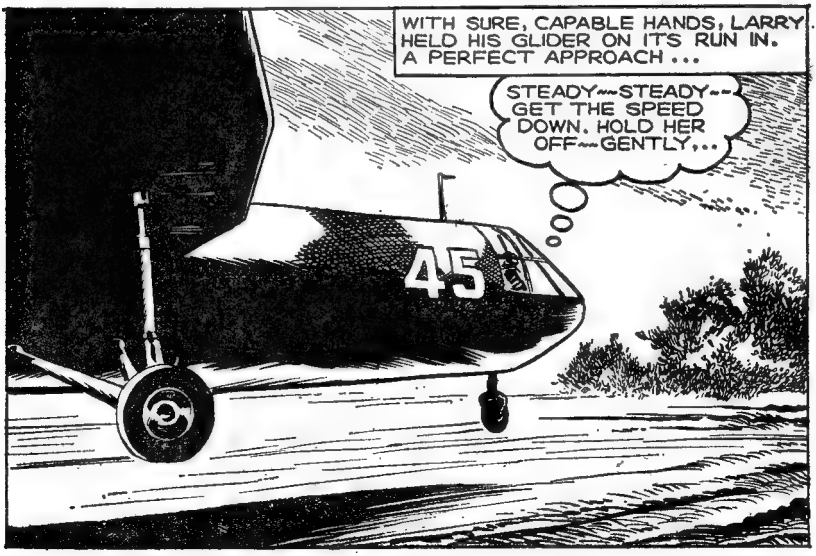
THEN CAME THE NEWS THAT BRITISH AIRBORNE UNITS HAD DROPPED ON ARNHEM...
THERE'S A RUMOUR WE'RE GOING IN TO SUPPORT THEM!
IT DOESN'T SOUND AS IF THEY'RE DOING TOO WELL.
THE POLISH LADS ARE BREATHING FIRE AND SLAUGHTER WAITING TO GO IN...


AT LAST, THE POLISH BRIGADE WAS COMMITTED TO THE BATTLE AND CRASH CHARLTON, BILL WRIGHT AND LARRY VINCENT FLEW THEIR GLIDERS TOWARDS THE LURID GLARE OF ARNHEM.

LARRY'S PILOTING SKILL WAS WORKING WITH MECHANICAL EFFICIENCY, BUT HIS MIND WAS FILLED WITH APPREHENSION.
RELEASE POINT COMING UP ~~ AND SO FAR EVERYTHING HAS GONE ALL RIGHT. BUT SOMETHING IS BOUND TO GO WRONG. WHO WILL MY JINX SELECT NEXT?


CHALLENGING BURSTS OF NAZI FLAK SOUGHT WITH HUNGRY FINGERS FOR THE FRAIL GLIDERS AND THEIR SLOW TUG-PLANES.


THEN THE TOWS WERE SLIPPED AND THE GLIDERS SWOOPED FREE, PLANING DOWNWARDS TO THEIR OBJECTIVES.
45


WITH SURE, CAPABLE HANDS, LARRY HELD HIS GLIDER ON ITS RUN IN. A PERFECT APPROACH ...
STEADY--STEADY--GET THE SPEED DOWN. HOLD HER OFF--GENTLY...
45

THEN IT WAS SKIDDING TO A HALT~~SAFE AND SOUND. ALREADY OTHER HORSAS WERE DISCHARGING THEIR CARGOES OF FIGHTING MEN.
45
DOWN~~AND NOW THE ROUGH STUFF REALLY BEGINS!

HIS JEEP AND AMMUNITION CARGO WERE SOON BEING UNLOADED BY THE POLISH SKYTROOPS.
GET THIS STUFF ON THE JEEP FAST! WE MUST GET THE AMMO DOWN TO THE BRIDGEHEAD!
WE'LL DO IT, TOMMY~~ NEVER FEAR...

BUT AT THAT MOMENT, ENEMY GUNS BEGAN TO RANGE ON TO THE LANDING ZONE. LARRY VINCENT'S GLIDER AND ITS CARGO RECEIVED A DIRECT HIT.
AAAGH!
WHEN HE CAME TO HIS SENSES, HE WAS SURROUNDED BY DESOLATION. BUT THE BATTLE HAD ONLY JUST STARTED...
ALL GLIDER PILOTS TO FORM A FIGHTING GROUP! FOLLOW ME, SERGEANT!
YES, SIR...
SOON, HE AND HALF A DOZEN GLIDER PILOTS HAD GATHERED BY A RAILWAY EMBANKMENT THAT BARRED THEIR WAY TO THE BRIDGE AND THE MAIN BULK OF THE BRITISH FORCES.
CRASH! THANK HEAVENS YOU'RE OKAY! SEEN BILL?
HE'LL BE ALL RIGHT. HE'S PROBABLY AT THE BRIDGE BY NOW...

THEN THEY FOUND A CULVERT BENEATH THE EMBANKMENT AND WERE ABLE TO MAKE THEIR WAY INTO THE HEART OF THE BATTLEGROUND.
COME ON! WE MUST JOIN UP WITH THE MAIN FORCES AROUND THE BRIDGE!
LOOKS PRETTY WARM THERE!

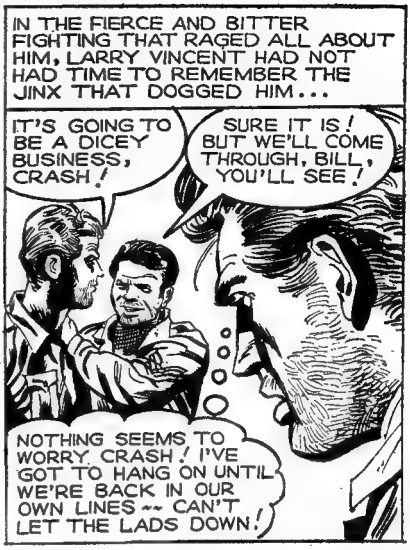
THE BRIDGE OF ARNHEM, THE VITAL LINK FOR WHICH THE BRITISH AIRBORNE DIVISION FOUGHT SO HARD, TOWERED ABOVE THE SMOKE...
WELL, THE BRIDGE IS STILL THERE!
AND WE'VE GOT TO STOP JERRY FROM TAKING IT BACK UNTIL THE SECOND ARMY GET HERE!

THERE WAS FIERCE FIGHTING ABOUT THE GREAT BRIDGE AS THE NAZIS FLUNG EVERYTHING THEY HAD AGAINST THE SLENDER LINE OF BRITISH PARATROOPS ...
WE MUST FERRET OUT THESE ENGLANDER RATS! FIRE AT EVERY GLIMPSE OF THEM!

BUT THE AIRBORNE HELD ON GRIMLY--THROUGH EIGHT LONG DAYS AND NIGHTS.
I DON'T KNOW HOW MUCH LONGER THEY EXPECT US TO LAST. OUR AMMO'S GOING AND WE'VE NO FOOD OR WATER.
WE'LL HOLD 'EM, LARRY. DID YOU HEAR BILL WRIGHT'S OKAY--HE'S FIGHTING DOWN BY THE RIVER

STUBBORNLY THOUGH THEY FOUGHT, THE AIRBORNE WERE BEING COMPRESSED INTO A SMALLER AND SMALLER PERIMETER--
AND STILL THE SECOND ARMY HAD NOT BROKEN THROUGH TO THEM.

AT LAST, THE ORDERS CAME FOR THE REMNANTS OF THE ALLIED FORCE TO WITHDRAW.
WE'RE NOT GOING TO BE RELIEVED AND SO WE'RE PULLING OUT. SMALL PARTIES ARE CROSSING THE RIVER TONIGHT. KEEP TOGETHER, YOU GLIDER PILOTS.
WE'LL MAKE IT ALL RIGHT, SIR. YOU CAN'T KEEP GOOD GLIDER MEN DOWN...


IN THE FIERCE AND BITTER FIGHTING THAT RAGED ALL ABOUT HIM, LARRY VINCENT HAD NOT HAD TIME TO REMEMBER THE JINX THAT DOGGED HIM...
IT'S GOING TO BE A DICEY BUSINESS, CRASH!
SURE IT IS! BUT WE'LL COME THROUGH, BILL, YOU'LL SEE!
NOTHING SEEMS TO WORRY CRASH! I'VE GOT TO HANG ON UNTIL WE'RE BACK IN OUR OWN LINES -- CAN'T LET THE LADS DOWN!

STEALTHILY, THE AIRBORNE TROOPS DISENGAGED WITH THE ENEMY AND MOVED DOWN TO THE RIVER.
KEEP IT QUIET THERE! JERRY'S GOT SPANDAUS ZEROED IN ALONG HERE. TREAD CAREFULLY!

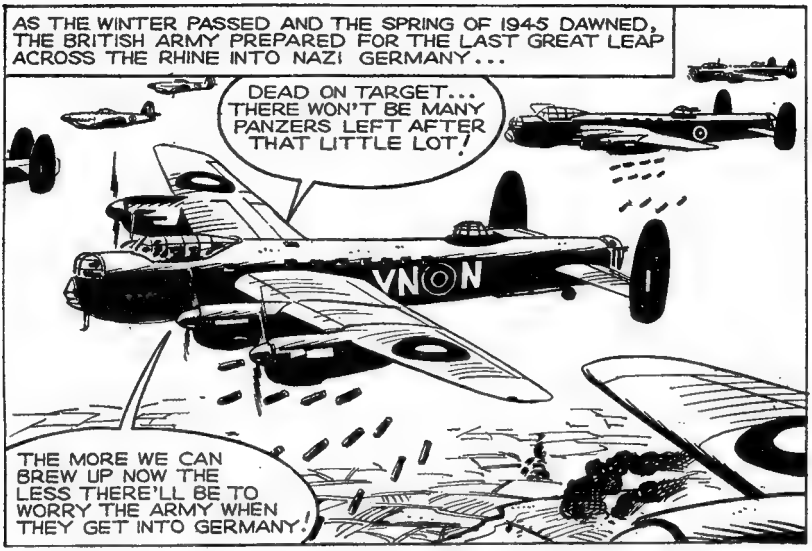
SERGEANT VINCENT, CHARLTON AND WRIGHT REACHED THE RIVER TOGETHER AND PREPARED FOR THEIR SWIM. ABOUT THEM, THE NIGHT BREATHED MENACE...
WHAT'S KEEPING YOU, CRASH? THIS WATER'S COLD!
I'M COMING. I CAN'T SWIM IN ALL THIS CLOBBER...

AT THAT MOMENT, LARRY VINCENT'S FOOT SLIPPED ON THE MUDDY SLOPE OF THE RIVER BANK AND HE TOPPLED WITH A SPLASH INTO THE WATER.
DON'T MAKE SO MUCH CONFOUNDED NOISE BACK THERE!
I SLIPPED...

WAS IT MERE COINCIDENCE OR WAS LARRY VINCENT'S JINX WORKING AGAIN? AT THAT MOMENT, A SPANDAU OPENED UP VICIOUSLY FROM SOME DISTANCE ALONG THE BANK.
DARN IT! A SPANDAU! BUT HE COULDN'T HAVE HEARD ME--HE'S MUCH TOO FAR AWAY...
WHETHER HE HEARD YOU OR NOT HE'S REALLY PUTTING A BARRAGE DOWN. WHERE'S CRASH?

BUT A STRAY BULLET FROM THAT RAKING BURST OF MACHINE GUN FIRE HAD HIT CRASH CHARLTON EVEN AS HE WAS ABOUT TO TAKE TO THE WATER.
LARRY VINCENT LOOKED BACK IN TIME TO SEE HIS FRIEND TOPPLE LIFELESS INTO THE MUD.
CRASH--NO! IT WASN'T MY FAULT!
HE'S BOUGHT IT! WHOEVER'S FAULT IT WAS...CRASH IS DEAD!

Chapter 4. The Final Blow


AS THE WINTER PASSED AND THE SPRING OF 1945 DAWNED, THE BRITISH ARMY PREPARED FOR THE LAST GREAT LEAP ACROSS THE RHINE INTO NAZI GERMANY...
DEAD ON TARGET... THERE WON'T BE MANY PANZERS LEFT AFTER THAT LITTLE LOT!
VN N
THE MORE WE CAN BREW UP NOW THE LESS THERE'LL BE TO WORRY THE ARMY WHEN THEY GET INTO GERMANY!

EVERYWHERE, THE SIGNS OF THE COMING BATTLE TO END THE WAR SHOWED THE MASSIVE BUILD-UP OF MEN AND EQUIPMENT.
YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE A FORTUNE-TELLER TO KNOW WHERE THEY'RE GOING!
AND YOU'LL BE ONE OF THE FIRST ACROSS THE BRIDGE, MY LUCKY LADS—AFTER THE AIRBORNE, OF COURSE!

THE AIRBORNE WERE GIRDING THEMSELVES ONCE AGAIN FOR THE FRAY~~AND THE GLIDER PILOTS WERE IN THE FOREFRONT OF THE PREPARATIONS.
IT WON'T BE LONG NOW, LARRY! ONCE WE'RE INTO GERMANY THE WAR'S ALMOST OVER. I ONLY HOPE I'M ALIVE TO SEE THE END.
OF COURSE YOU WILL BE, BILL!

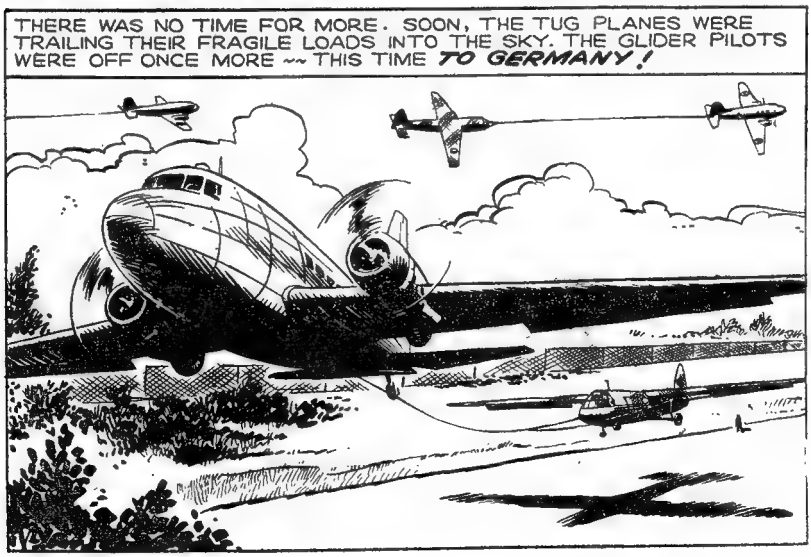
BILL'S REMARK UNSETTLED LARRY, MAKING HIM UNSURE OF WRIGHT'S CONTINUED FRIENDSHIP ...
YOU'VE HARDLY SPOKEN A WORD TO ME, BILL, JUST LATELY. WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND?
NOTHING~~ EXCEPT THAT I KEEP THINKING OF CRASH AND JOCK~~AND OF ANDY, WHO I NEVER KNEW. THEY WERE ALL YOUR FRIENDS.

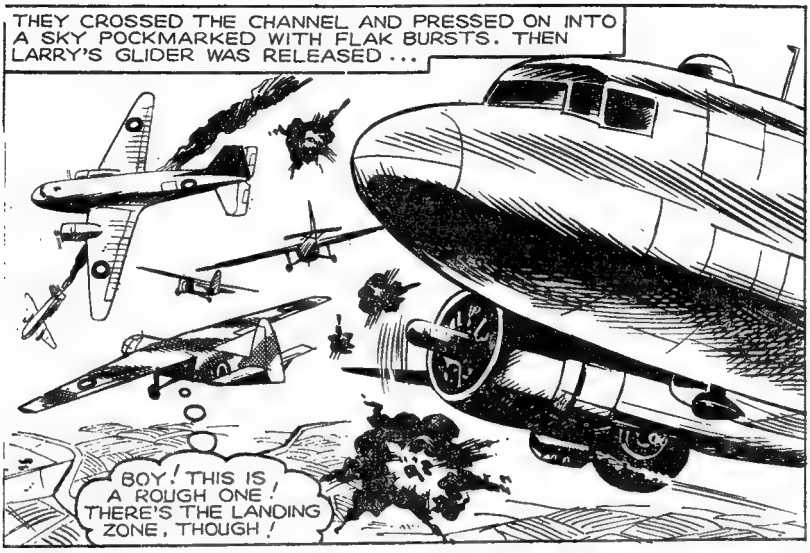
DISMAYED, LARRY VINCENT STARED AT THE OTHER SERGEANT PILOT.
OF COURSE THEY WERE MY FRIENDS~~AND SO ARE YOU, BILL! YOU DON'T HAVE TO REMIND ME OF WHAT HAPPENED. D'YOU THINK I CAN FORGET?
NO~~NO, I DON'T! BUT THEY WERE YOUR FRIENDS AND EACH ONE DIED WITH YOU AROUND. EACH ONE DIED BECAUSE OF YOU ...

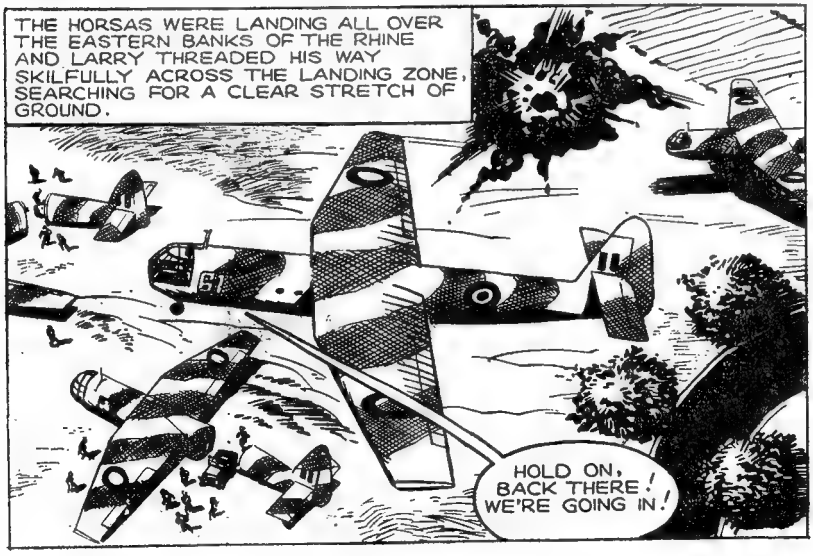
SHAKEN BY THE STARTLING REVELATION OF BILL WRIGHT'S TRUE FEELINGS, LARRY VINCENT FOUGHT TO KEEP A GRIP ON HIMSELF, BUT THE OTHER WENT ON REMORSELESSLY.
YOU KILLED YOUR FRIENDS, LARRY--YOU SAID SO YOURSELF. WELL, KEEP AWAY FROM ME ON THIS OP, WILL YOU ?
LISTEN, BILL--THEY WERE ALL ACCIDENTS THAT COULD HAVE HAPPENED TO ANYONE! I'M NO JINX--YOU DON'T HAVE TO FEAR ME!
FEAR YOU ? YOU'RE NOTHING BUT A MURDERER!
AT THAT, LARRY VINCENT EXPLODED IN ANGER AND FRUSTRATION.
TAKE THAT BACK!

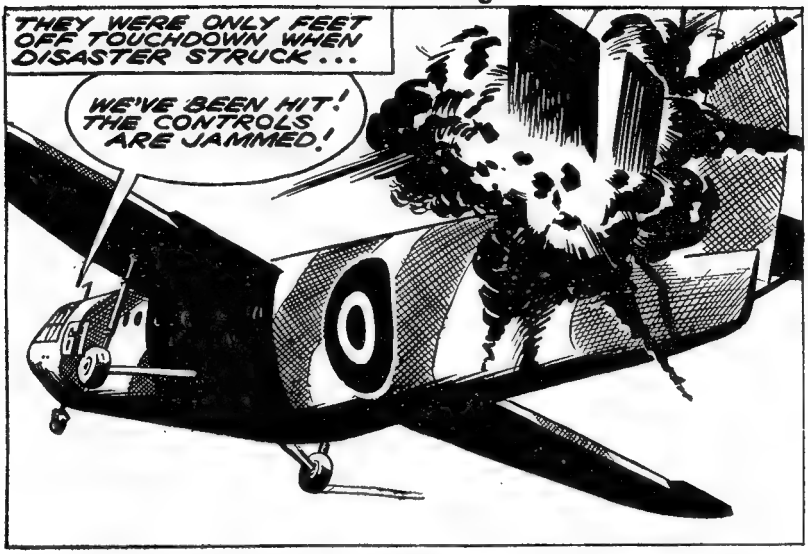
WITHOUT ANOTHER GLANCE AT THE MAN WHO HAD CALLED HIM A MURDERER, LARRY STRODE FROM THE HUT...
HELLO! WHAT'S UP WITH SARN'T VINCENT ? HE LOOKS MADDER THAN A BEAR STUNG BY BEES!
IF THAT'S WHAT FRIENDSHIP COSTS, THEN LET'S FINISH IT! AT LEAST I WON'T KILL BILL WRIGHT NOW!
BUT JUST AS THE GREAT ARMADA WAS ABOUT TO SET OFF, BILL WRIGHT WALKED UP TO LARRY.
WRIGHT! I HOPE HE'S NOT GOING TO CUT UP ROUGH NOW, JUST WHEN WE'RE OFF!
LARRY, I'M SORRY FOR WHAT I SAID. YOU WERE RIGHT TO LAND ME ONE...

BRIEFLY, IN THOSE TENSE, PRE-FLIGHT MOMENTS, A SMILE TOUCHED THE GRIM FACES OF BILL WRIGHT AND LARRY VINCENT.
WE'RE STILL FRIENDS AND I'LL RUN THE RISK OF THAT, LARRY~~ IF THERE IS ANY RISK.
61
THANKS, BILL! IT'S DONE ME GOOD TO HEAR THAT. BUT YOU LOOK ROUGH. I SHOULDN'T HAVE HIT YOU SO HARD . . .

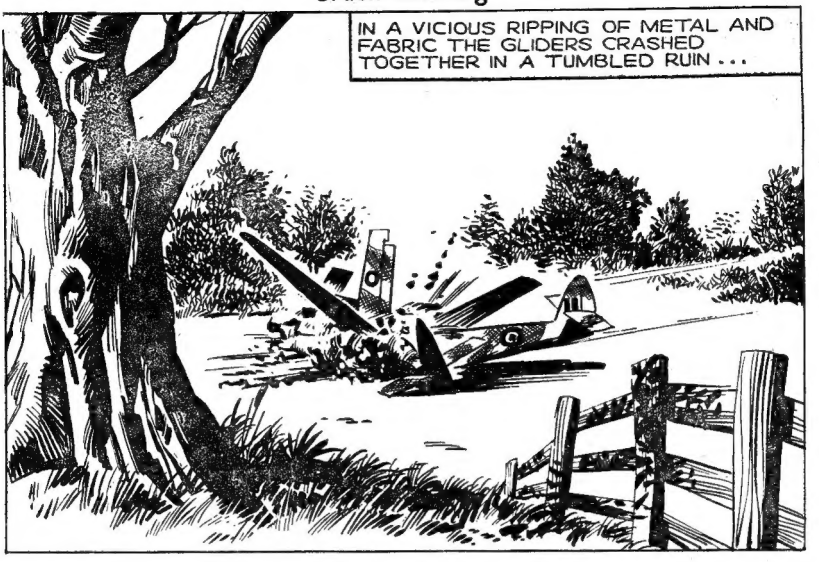

THERE WAS NO TIME FOR MORE. SOON, THE TUG PLANES WERE TRAILING THEIR FRAGILE LOADS INTO THE SKY. THE GLIDER PILOTS WERE OFF ONCE MORE ~~ THIS TIME TO GERMANY!

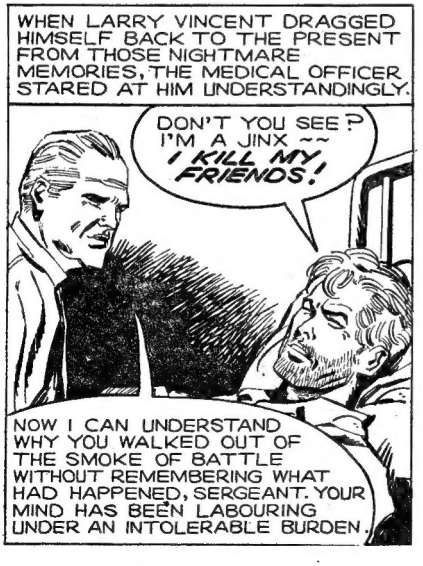

THEY CROSSED THE CHANNEL AND PRESSED ON INTO A SKY POCKMARKED WITH FLAK BURSTS. THEN LARRY'S GLIDER WAS RELEASED ...
BOY! THIS IS A ROUGH ONE! THERE'S THE LANDING ZONE, THOUGH!


THE HORSAS WERE LANDING ALL OVER THE EASTERN BANKS OF THE RHINE AND LARRY THREADED HIS WAY SKILFULLY ACROSS THE LANDING ZONE, SEARCHING FOR A CLEAR STRETCH OF GROUND.
HOLD ON, BACK THERE! WE'RE GOING IN!


THEY WERE ONLY FEET OFF TOUCHDOWN WHEN DISASTER STRUCK...
WE'VE BEEN HIT! THE CONTROLS ARE JAMMED!

OUT OF CONTROL, LARRY'S GLIDER LURCHED ROUND IN A SHALLOW BANK. THEN, STATIONARY BEFORE HIM HE SAW ANOTHER HORSA ~~ AND RECOGNISED THE NUMBER ON THE FUSELAGE.
GOOD GRIEF! THAT'S BILL WRIGHT'S GLIDER! I'M GOING TO HIT HIM! THERE'S NOTHING I CAN DO TO STOP IT!


IN A VICIOUS RIPPING OF METAL AND FABRIC THE GLIDERS CRASHED TOGETHER IN A TUMBLED RUIN ...


WHEN LARRY VINCENT DRAGGED HIMSELF BACK TO THE PRESENT FROM THOSE NIGHTMARE MEMORIES, THE MEDICAL OFFICER STARED AT HIM UNDERSTANDINGLY.
DON'T YOU SEE? I'M A JINX ~~ I KILL MY FRIENDS!
NOW I CAN UNDERSTAND WHY YOU WALKED OUT OF THE SMOKE OF BATTLE WITHOUT REMEMBERING WHAT HAD HAPPENED, SERGEANT. YOUR MIND HAS BEEN LABOURING UNDER AN INTOLERABLE BURDEN.

SUDDENLY, THE MAJOR BENT CLOSER, HIS WORDS SLOW AND EARNESTLY SPOKEN.
NOW LISTEN TO ME! IT WAS NOT PRIMARILY YOUR FAULT THAT ANY OF YOUR FRIENDS DIED ~~ NOT EVEN ANDY! YOU'VE BEEN TORTURING YOURSELF UNNECESSARILY! YOU ARE NOT A JINX! AND I'LL PROVE IT TO YOU ...

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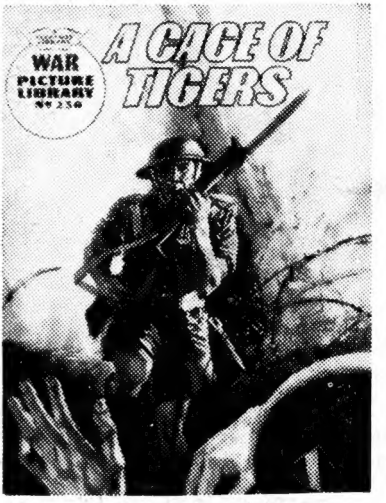

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